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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 003187

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR MASS MOPS
SUBJECT: USAU: AMISOM EVALUATING MOGADISHU WITHDRAWAL

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN SIMON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

¶1. (C) On 20 November 2008, Colonel George Amamoo, the Acting Chief of the African Union's (AU) Strategic Planning and Management Unit (SPMU) for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) called a meeting of local Defense Attaches to provide an update of the situation in Somalia. The Acting SPMU Chief reported that Merca was held by Al-Shabaab and insurgents were located approximately 60-70 KMs South of Mogadishu with suspected Al-Shabaab operatives or small units operating inside Mogadishu. Amamoo reported an estimated force strength for Al-Shabaab at 400-500 with their suspected intention to encircle the City of Mogadishu. Amamoo reported an AMISOM Force strength in Mogadishu at 3400 along with approximately 1000 ENDF troops the city. Although the ENDF is not part of AMISOM, Amamoo indicated that the AMISOM Force Commander communicates and coordinates with the ENDF and, in the current state, believes that Al-Shabaab does not have the capacity to overtake AMISOM and the ENDF in Mogadishu. However, Amamoo went on to comment that an Ethiopian withdrawal would a very large problem for AMISOM and if the TFG were to collapse altogether, AMISOM would no longer have a valid mandate for being in Mogadishu.

¶2. (C) The Acting SPMU Chief further reported that the AMISOM Force Commander was evaluating Mogadishu withdrawal options with air and sea as the most likely modalities. The final decision for AMISOM withdrawal, Amamoo said, would come from AU political heads. Of concern in executing a withdrawal was alarming the civilian population as it was anticipated that civilians would rush to AMISOM basing areas complicating the withdrawal. Further, if Al-Shabaab was alerted, it was anticipated that Al-Shabaab would also rush to pre-existing AMISOM basing areas to establish immediate strategic positions. It was also thought that Al-Shabaab would not provide a permissive withdrawal environment in an attempt to acquire AMISOM equipment, weapons and supplies or making a strong terrorism statement of victory. Because of such an anticipated environment, Amamoo conceded, the AU and AMISOM would look to the international community for assistance in the event a withdrawal was required.

¶3. (C) Comment: This meeting was called to set expectations of the international community for a call for hardware support for a withdrawal of AMISOM forces from Mogadishu. The Acting SPMU Chief will be going to Mogadishu next week to consult with the Force Commander on the requirements for a withdrawal plan and will return to Addis Ababa with specific requirements that will be passed to the international community for review by capitals. At the same time, the SPMU continues to plan for an increase in AMISOM Force Strength with the addition of four new battalion - 1 Ugandan, 1 Burundi, 1 Kenyan, and 1 Sudanese.

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